Community Engagement and Participatory Decisionmaking

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What is Community Engagement?

• Buzz word
• Community consultation – often a requirement for government and agencies
• “A hoop to pass through”, “Ticking the box”
• Building social capital and individual responsibility

Models of local democracy
(Andrews and Turner 2006)

• Consumerist engagement
• Participatory engagement
• Stakeholder engagement
• Citizen centred democracy
• Radical democracy

Consumerist Engagement

• Focuses on communication with ‘customers’ about services in order to bring about improvements/increase responsiveness
• ‘Customers’ can choose whether or not to use services
• More often used to rubber stamp, for example levels of service provision

Participatory engagement

• Focus on capacity building
• Can be very successful and help communities to ‘reduce inequalities in the distribution of power’ (Stoker, 1998)
• Requires extra resources and ongoing attention
• Danger of being hijacked by powerful groups or fizzling out.
Citizen centred democracy
- Citizen governance
- Partnerships
- Public interest at the foundation of political decisionmaking
- Bottom up structures of participation and sharing of power with elected councils
- Increasing social capital

Stakeholder democracy
- “Viewing the public as stakeholders fragments citizenship and communities making them too susceptible to managerial rather than political treatment” (Andrews and Turner 2006 p385)
- Tendency to individual interests and not collective good.

Radical democracy
- Danger that “agonistic” engagement can polarise communities “between rival factions” or cause disengagement through endless disputes.
- Participatory processes which deliver solutions for all, not just greatest collective power.
Take Aways!

- Process should fit the purpose
- Purpose should not be confined to fit the process
- Don’t raise unrealistic expectations thru lack of planning
- A participatory project may consist of several different processes
- Many ways not one
- Flexibility and ongoing evaluation vital!

References